

# Dumb Ways to Decide

Avoiding bad decisions in Agile Development



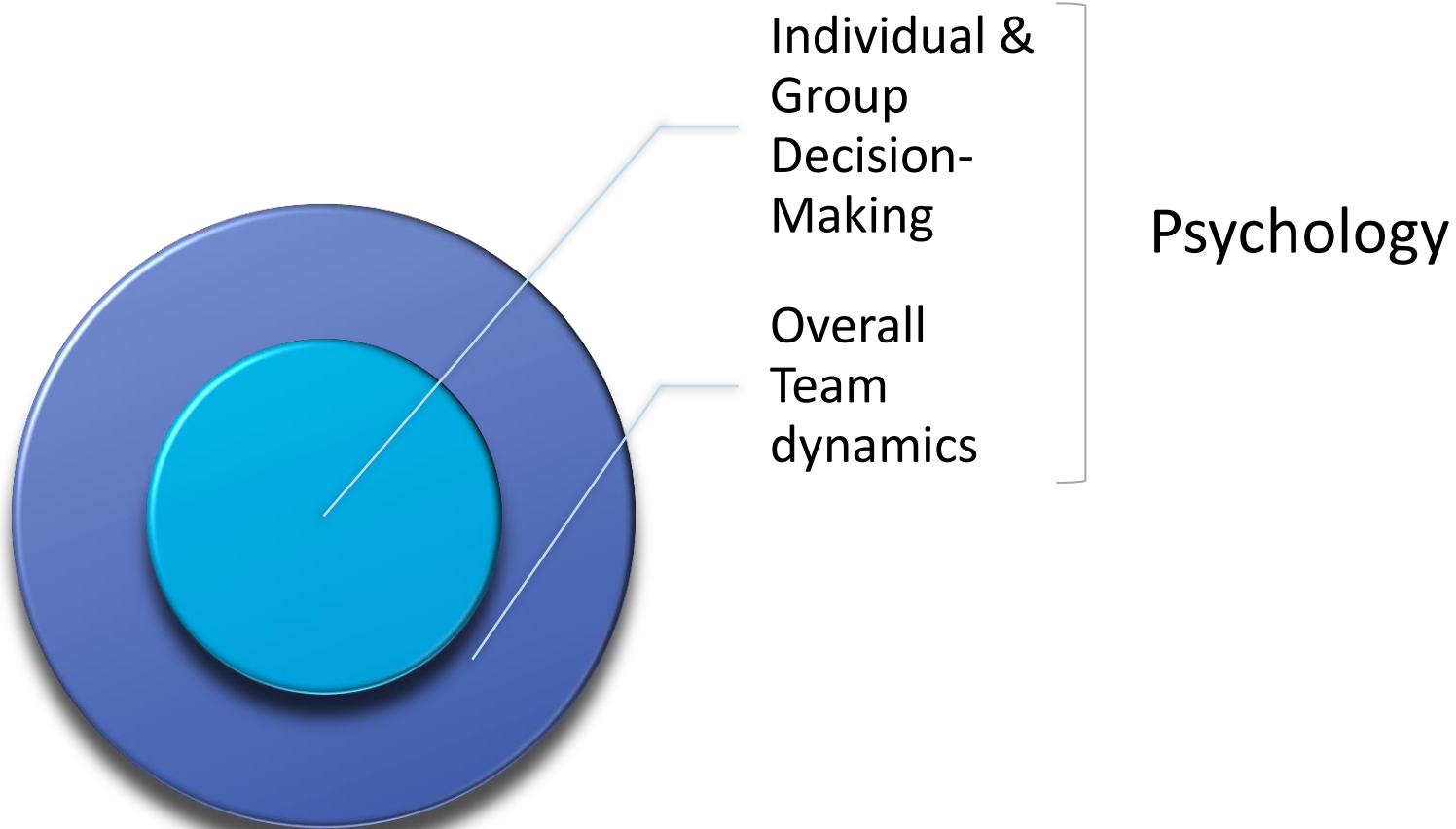
by Rob Pyne | X or Y Decisions | [xorydecisions.com.au](http://xorydecisions.com.au)

**\$400m disaster**

**HealthCare.gov**





Take health care into your own hands

# A perspective on agile



# Rational decision-making



- 
-  **W**hat's the problem
  -  **I**dentify solutions
  -  **S**elect the best one
  -  **E**xecute and review



Recognize



First idea



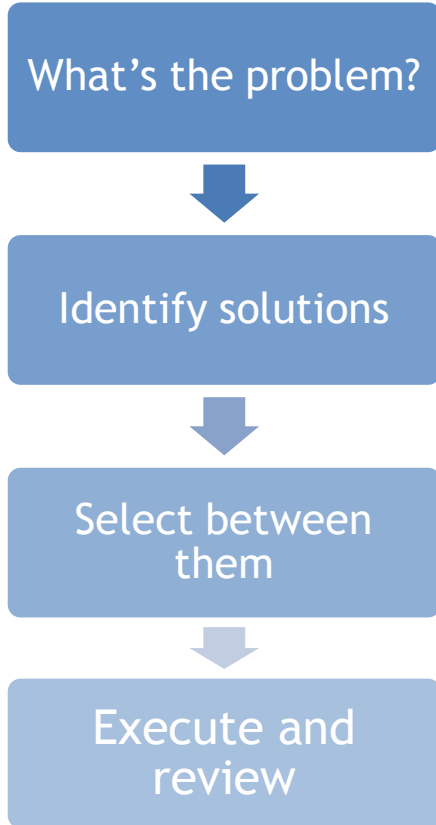
Is it good enough?



Do it

**Natural decision-making**

# Maximize

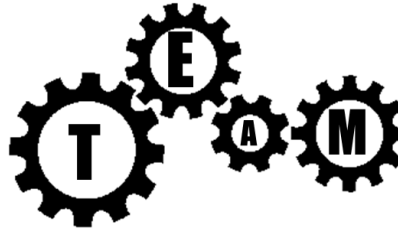


Accurate

Broad

Optimize

Learn



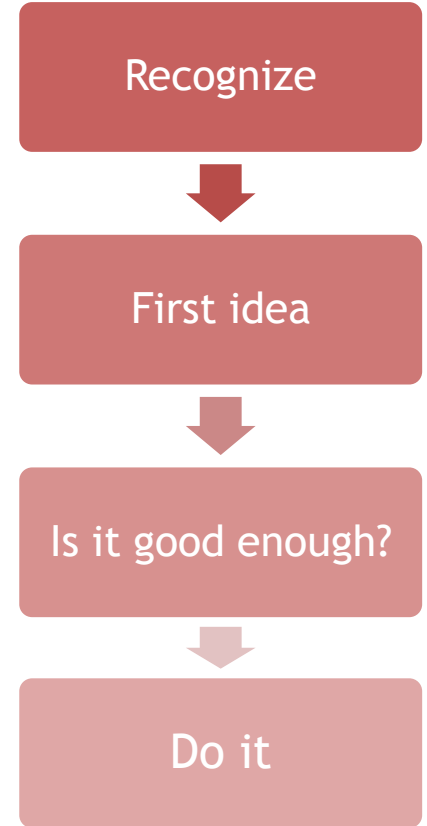
Assumptions

Narrow

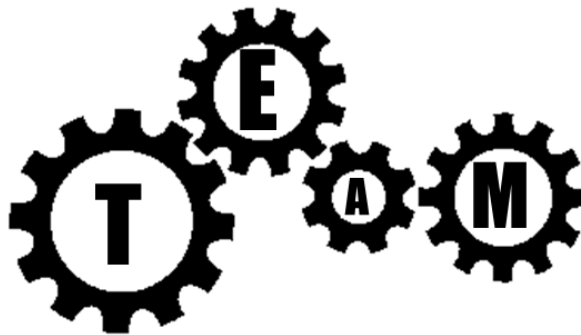
Gut feel

Plough on

# Satisfice



**A top team can be 2,000x more productive**



# Agile does decisions well



Planning poker  
generates multiple  
independent views



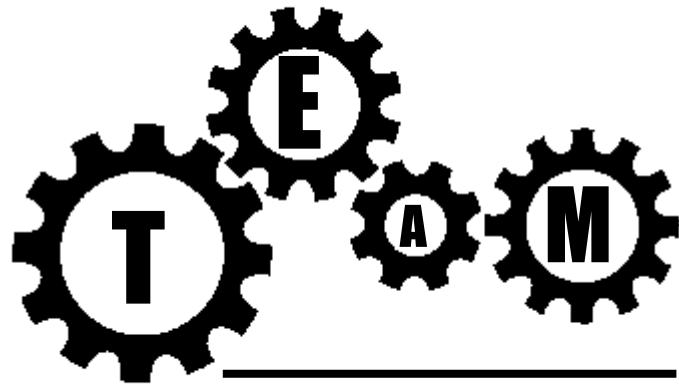
Pair programming  
encourages developers  
to challenge each  
other's assumptions  
and add new options



Scrum master  
should ensure  
everyone's voice  
gets heard



# Optimal decision-making



Trust  
Honesty  
Commitment\*



- W** What's the problem
- I** Identify solutions
- S** Select the best one
- E** Execute and review

**There are still areas to improve**

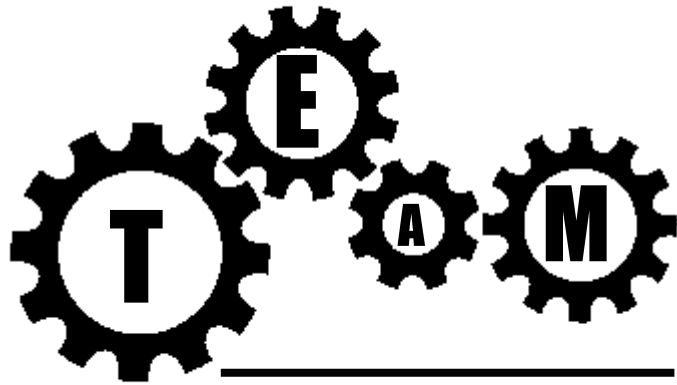
**In pairs or 3s**

**Top 2 reasons Agile decisions go wrong**

**3 minutes**

# 2 places agile decisions go wrong?





Pairs / Threes  
3 minutes



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Trust  
Honesty  
Commitment



- 
-  What's the problem
  -  Identify solutions
  -  Select the best one
  -  Execute and review

# The primary & secondary research

Authors:  
Acton  
Conboy  
Coyle  
Drury  
Maurier  
Power  
Zannier



## Decision Making in Agile Development: A Focus Group Study of Decisions & Obstacles

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**Abstract**— The process and effectiveness of decision making in agile development is critical yet poorly understood. This research examines decisions made across the four stages of the sprint cycle: Sprint Planning, Sprint Execution, Sprint Review and Sprint Retrospective. A focus group was

However, little is known regarding decision making in ASD teams. Some research has found that ASD team members rely on their experience to determine whether a design decision is necessary [8] and then compare options when making design decisions [9]. Attempts have been

## Foundations of Agile Decision Making from Agile Mentors and Developers

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**Abstract.** There are few studies of how software developers make decisions in software design and none that places agile in the context of these decision making processes. In this paper, we present results of interviewing agile software developers and mentors to determine how design decision making aligns with

## Group Process Losses in Agile Software Development Decision Making

Sharon Coyle, Whitaker Institute for Innovation & Societal Change,  
National University of Ireland, Galway

Kieran Conboy, Lero, National University of Ireland, Galway  
Thomas Acton, Lero, National University of Ireland, Galway

### Abstract

The importance of effective decision making in organisations has been well documented. Despite the many benefits associated with groupwork, groups are often subjected to process losses such as groupthink, which in turn have a negative impact on group decision making. Limited prior research has suggested that such process losses may be even more prevalent in agile software development characterised by highly cohesive, self-managing teams. This

## Comparing Decision Making in Agile and Non-Agile Software Organizations

Carmen Zannier<sup>1</sup>, Frank Maurer<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Our ability to improve decision making in software development hinges on understanding how decisions are made, and which approaches to decision making are better than others. However, as of yet there are few studies examining how software developers make decisions in software design, especially studies that place agile approaches in the context of decision making.

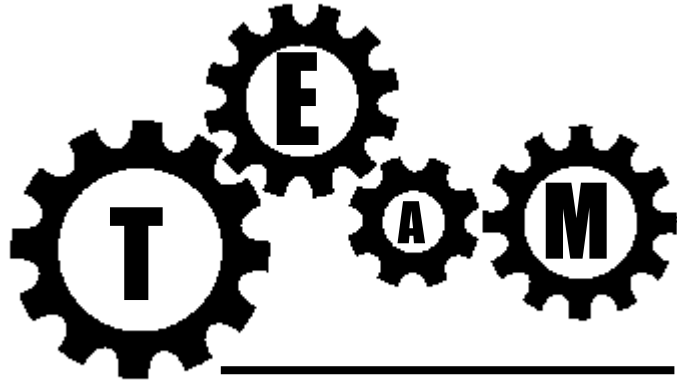
# SCRUM PROCESS



Looked at Decision-Making quality throughout the scrum process

Planning & Retrospective are where some of the bigger decisions are getting made.

# The two biggest challenges



Trust  
Honesty  
Commitment

Lack of honesty  
leading to hidden  
information



- W** What's the problem
- I** Identify solutions
- S** Select the best one
- E** Execute and review

Rushing to a solution. Over-reliance on satisficing - as if we're firefighters



Lack of honesty  
leading to hidden  
information

## Symptoms

- Fear of speaking up
- Fear of mentioning impediments
- Fear of being wrong
- Fear of failure
- Dominant voices
- Disengagement



**Rushing to a solution.  
Over-reliance on  
satisficing - as if we're  
firefighters**

## Symptoms

- 75%+ decisions as “satisficers”\*
- Poor planning meetings don't give enough time to “big rocks”
- Consent process
- Not enough time to compare alternatives
- Lose sight of organisational goals
- Lack of cross team collaboration
- Not getting full commitment





**Problem: Team dysfunctions**

**Solution: Team diagnostic**

# 5 Team dysfunctions



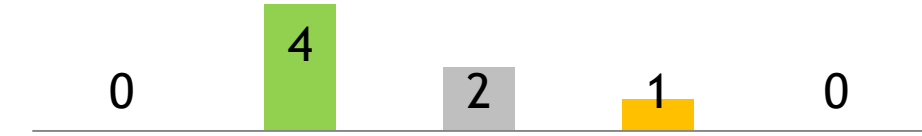
# Trust 54



50 We all respect and leverage individual differences in strengths, style and skill set



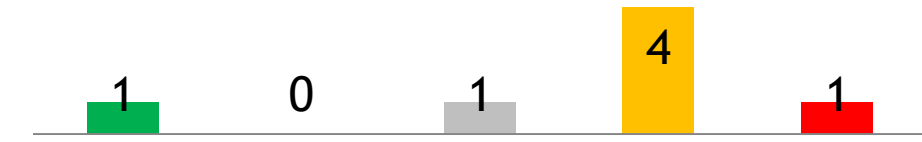
61 We have the required capability to deliver our goals



64 We trust one another to deliver on commitments



36 We know about one another's personal lives and are comfortable discussing them





**Problem: poor planning meetings**

**Solution: Rock Master**

# Honest conversations

39

During meetings, the most important and most difficult issues are put on the table to be resolved



0

1

2

3

1

**Solution: Rock Master**





**Problem: not enough options**

**Solution: Vanishing Options Test**



**Imagine a genie makes your current option disappear. What would you do?**



**Problem: not enough time to compare options**

**Solution: Clever criteria**





**Make**

**Price**

**Colour**

**Sunroof**

**Fuel economy**

**Seats**

**Age New/Used**

**Fit my surfboard**

**Easy to park**

**Child seat anchors**

**Reliability**

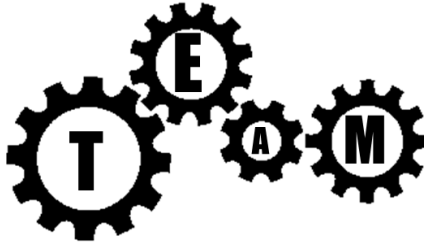
**Warranty**

# How else should we improve?

**In pairs or 3s**

**2 ways to improve Agile decision-making**

**3 minutes**



Lack of honesty / hidden information

**Team diagnostic**



Rushing to a solution

**Rock Master**

**Vanishing Options**

**Clever criteria**

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